

TESTIMONY: SB 59

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I am grateful to the House Committee on Natural Resources, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation for providing an opportunity for the public to comment on SB 59.

My opposition to SB 59 is based on my religious beliefs and the common sense of Michigan citizens. Currently, I serve as the Director of the Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network, a statewide network of Unitarian Universalist activists from 27 UU congregations. It is a matter of principle with the Unitarian Universalist denomination that all people, regardless of their race, income or gender identify, must be treated with respect and dignity. Our denomination believes that safe coexistence within society requires reasonable compromise with the concept of personal liberty. Since 1972, our denomination has supported the licensing of all usable guns. Reasons: firearms are a leading cause of accidental death among U.S. children age 14 and under. Two thirds of all U.S. murders, about 10,886, were committed with firearms. "Thou shalt not kill" is one of the most well known of the ten commandments honored by Christians, Jews and Unitarian Universalists. Unfortunately, America has the highest rate of civilian gun ownership in the world, twice as high as the next most frequently armed country of Yemen. With so many guns in our country, it is important that the risks of injury and death are minimized through enlightened laws.

Current Michigan law designates certain areas as "no carry zones", including schools and school property, day care centers and child-care agencies, sports arenas and stadiums, places of worship, bars, entertainment facilities with a seating capacity of 2,500 or more, hospitals, college or university classrooms. It is quite troubling that SB 59 would allow loaded handguns to be brought into these, our most sacred and safe places for our families, students and children. It is highly inappropriate to carry any weapon, be open or concealed, into a place of worship where the virtues of peace and reconciliation are taught and practiced.

I am not alone in my belief that certain safety zones need to be preserved in Michigan. A poll of 699 likely Michigan voters done in April 2012 showed that 72% of voters OPPOSED SB 59 and 63% strongly so. Even among people who carried concealed weapons, 53% opposed this bill! SB 59 is also opposed by the Michigan Catholic Conference, the Michigan Sheriff's Association, the Michigan Health and Hospital Association, Michigan activists within the Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the National Council of Jewish Women.

Expanding the possibilities of bringing guns into no carry zones is moving Michigan in the wrong direction. I urge you to honor Michigan citizens' religious beliefs and to support the will of the majority of Michigan's people. I urge you to vote no on SB 59.